

31st & Pearl

Little by Little

With its 7-July-2010 [editorial](#) entitled “USM decision hurts writing program,” even *The Hattiesburg American* has figured out that something is amiss vis-à-vis USM’s decision to can English professor Frederick Barthelme, an award-winning, nationally renowned author of almost 20 books. Offering a nice follow-up to [its own report](#), as well as [that](#) from USMNEWS.net, *THA*’s editor cited the high ranking of Barthelme’s Center for Writers (which ties into the fact that the Center attracts students “who have choices”) and the very good bargain Barthelme represented for USM, in castigating the institution for this latest debacle.

Sure, when \$10 million in cuts are sought, some pain will be felt. However, in this case, as in so many others, USM, to paraphrase “AbbyD,” eliminates the good and glorifies the bad. And if the past decade is any indication, it has been doing so for 100 years. With the exception of the occasional Ed Kemp article, or the random *THA* editorial, there has been very little *THA* scrutiny of the university since president Martha Saunders arrived back in 2007. Since then, USM has fallen back to *U.S. News & World Report*’s lowest tier (2010), and Saunders made the ill-advised decision of the century when she encumbered \$2 million of the institution’s budget in leasing an airplane from the USM Foundation. Little by little, the institution’s reputation continues to erode.

At some point the faculty senate and other governing bodies are going to have to lift the veil protecting Saunders. Yes, the Shelby Thames era (2002-07) was bad. But, that shouldn’t excuse faculty from shining light on the bad ideas of subsequent administrations. Case in point – the *AAUP Message Board/USM Forum* has yet (as of 8-June-2010) to even link *THA*’s report and editorial on Barthelme’s elimination to its website, even though just about everything else regarding USM is usually linked there *post haste*. In the midst of the “great recession,” even the Queen of England is taking heat over budgetary matters. Isn’t it time “Aunt Martha” does so as well?

31st & Pearl is a series housed at usmnews.net that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.